



2010

RHYIssues@aGlance

Working with Head Start Programs: Tips to Serve Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Are there pregnant teens in your program that would like free information on prenatal nutrition? Teen mothers who could benefit from parenting education? Or children who need extra help getting ready for school? Head Start may be able to help.

About the Head Start and Early Head Start programs

What is Head Start?

Head Start is more than just child care. It's a free Federal program that provides comprehensive developmental services for low-income preschool children, ages three to five years, and social services for their families.

Head Start Programs Provide:

- Early childhood education to give preschoolers the social and cognitive skills they need to be successful in school and in life;
- Social services to children and parents, including health and mental health services, nutrition counseling and information on early childhood development;
- Support to families, including engaging parents in their children's learning and helping parents identify and meet their own education or employment goals; and
- Community partnerships, including close collaborations with homeless youth programs.

What is Early Head Start?

Early Head Start expands the services of the Head Start program to low-income families with children under three and to pregnant women. Participants receive the same comprehensive child development education, health, mental health and nutrition services as Head Start families. While Head Start services are primarily provided at centers, in Early Head Start trained teachers visit the parent and child (typically once a week) to work with them directly. Early Head Start also helps pregnant women access prenatal and postpartum care.

Who is eligible for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs?

Low-income children, ages three to five years, are eligible for Head Start. Low-income pregnant women and their children, from birth to age three, are eligible for Early Head Start. Both programs use **Federal poverty guidelines** (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml>) to evaluate family income.

Pregnant or parenting youth who are homeless and their children are also entitled to receive services through Head Start.

While full-day programs (where children attend for six or more hours per day) expect parents to be working or enrolled in school, most Head Start programs do not have this requirement.

Beyond the Federal regulations, each local Head Start and Early Head Start agency establishes its own eligibility criteria and local programs determine each family's eligibility. Programs may choose to target their services to particular populations, such as Native Americans, homeless families, or pregnant teens, depending on the needs in their community.



The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH **Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Centers**
Supported by the DHHS Family and Youth Services Bureau | 4502 E. 41st St., Bldg. 4W | Tulsa, OK 74135-2512 | 1 (800) 806-2711
www.nrcys.ou.edu | www.rhyttac.ou.edu | rhytraining@ou.edu | rhytechnicalassistance@ou.edu

Does Head Start accept children with disabilities?

While Head Start helps all children, Federal law says that programs must set aside at least 10 percent of its enrollment opportunities for children with disabilities.

How much does Head Start cost?

There is no cost for Head Start or Early Head Start services. Child care is free for low-income children and pregnant and parenting homeless youth.

Accessing Head Start and Early Head Start services

How do I find a Head Start program in our area?

See the **Head Start Locator** (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices>) on the **Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center** (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>) website. Or use the **Head Start Program Directory** (http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hslc_grantee_directory). The directory identifies Head Start and Early Head Start programs, as well as American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. If you need more help, call the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center toll-free at 1 (866) 763-6481.

How do I help pregnant and parenting teens in my program access Head Start services?

To apply or to determine eligibility, contact the Head Start agency in your community directly. Your local agency will explain the paperwork needed to apply, provide the required forms and answer questions about the program. Many programs require a child's latest immunization records, health and dental records, a copy of the child's birth certificate and proof of income. Help young people obtain required documentation and decide what services they want to request.

What if there's a waiting list for Head Start in my area?

Anyone interested in participating should apply. Sometimes openings come up unexpectedly, and while waiting lists can be discouraging, there's no way to get into the program without applying!

Tips for Working with Head Start Programs

- Visit the Head Start agency in your area, become familiar with the services it provides and learn what is needed for pregnant and parenting young people to apply.
- Introduce your agency and the services you provide to local Head Start staff, and work on building a strong collaborative relationship with them. Establish your agency as a resource, so they will feel comfortable referring parents to your agency for assistance.
- Offer to talk with Head Start staff about the challenges related to teen pregnancy and parenthood and ways they can support homeless youth and their children.
- Ask young people in your program to volunteer in Head Start classrooms one or two hours a week in exchange for child care. Head Start teachers get extra hands, and young mothers get volunteer hours as well as positive role modeling for interacting with children.
- Team up with Head Start on an employment program. Assist young women in your program gain the skills they need to succeed on the job, and Head Start can hire them to work in classrooms, kitchens and offices.

Where do I go if I have more questions?

Office of Head Start (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/index.html)

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Centers (www.rhyttac.ou.edu)

For more information:

Call: (800) 806-2711

E-mail: rhytechnicalassistance@ou.edu

Visit us on the web: www.rhyttac.ou.edu